

The Re-Creation of the New World

1



Norman MacAfee

Dance libretto with drawings to
Olivier Messiaen's solo piano piece
Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus
(Twenty Ways of Looking at Baby Jesus)

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The text of *The Re-Creation of the New World* was published in somewhat different form and without the drawings in 1984 in *Salome* magazine, Chicago, Effie Mihopoulos, editor.

This is the first publication of *The Re-Creation of the New World* with drawings. The drawings were scanned and digitized by Miguel Cervantes-Cervantes.

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About *The Re-Creation of the New World*

I have lived in New York City since 1967. In the spring of 1983, I was listening a lot to a recording of a long piano work by Olivier Messiaen, *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus (Twenty Ways of Looking at Baby Jesus)*. In Wynnewood, outside Philadelphia, my mother, Thelma Evelyn, age 81, was dying. I began writing and drawing a dance libretto, *The Re-Creation of the New World*, to the Messiaen, with a central figure, the First Mother. (When I was six, in 1949, I had ballet training, but ballet was not encouraged for boys, and I quit.) Mother died on June 1.

I had been pondering the concept of the First Mother for several years. The first human mother was born half a million years ago in what we now call Africa. A likely candidate for first human mother is Lucy, Dinkinesh, whose bones were found in Ethiopia in 1974.

In the United States, African-Americans have been used and abused by the power structure. As a girl, Mother saw D. W. Griffith's epic 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, with its climactic celebratory triumph of the Ku Klux Klan, and she sometimes confused the sweeping dramatic art of the film with truth, and alas even with good. The First Mother in *The Re-Creation of the New World* is thus part Dinkinesh, part Thelma, and embodies the prismatic and incalculable contradictions of the two.

Who would dance the First Mother in *The Re-Creation of the New World*? The Mother of Modern Dance, Martha Graham (1894-1991), is long dead. But she is present in my life. From 1937 to 1943, she lived and worked in the Greenwich Village apartment house in which since 1988 I live and work. Her company is pondering ways that *The Re-Creation of the New World* could be done. And I encourage other dance companies to do the same.

Norman MacAfee, Greenwich Village, June 2015

The Re-Creation of the New World

for Lucy Dinkinesh,
Thelma Evelyn Dietz MacAfee,
and
Martha Graham

1

The First Mother stands alone on stage.
Her daughter enters, standing behind her.
A third woman and a fourth, behind them.
Slowly the stage fills with the women of the First Mother.
Blackout.

1



2

Two young women, the First Mother and her best friend, are dancing together.

Two young men enter.

The First Mother flirts but disdains anything more intimate.

The second girl follows suit.

The boys exit.

The two girls dance as before, neither happy nor sad, but with the knowledge they will be friends till death.

Blackout.

3



3

Four men are wrestling, almost naked, in a TV tag team match.

Two villains are pummeling a handsome innocent as his partner stretches to help him from behind invisible ropes and the referee concentrates on the stretching while ignoring the mayhem wrought by evil.

Two 1920s gunmen sneak on stage.

A '50s convertible parks stage center.

Two men with only skimpy towels around their waists are comparing athlete's foot.

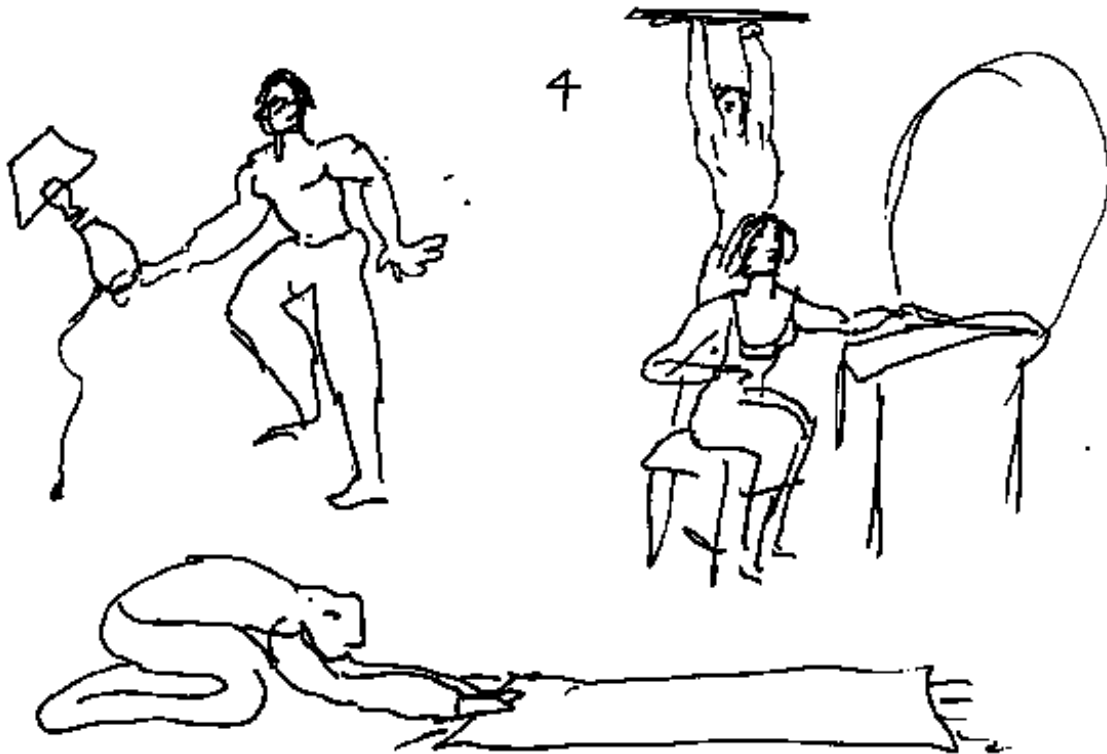
A man and woman in the car drink a canned soft drink and proceed to writhe, dying excruciatingly.

The First Mother in white Southern Baptist robes (homage to Gwyneth Jones's Brunnhilde in the Chéreau-Boulez *Ring*, itself homage to Vanessa Redgrave's Isadora) mimes singing about the greatest hero who has ever lived so far. Blackout.

4

A black backdrop.

Sitting at a dressing table, the First Mother, wearing a slip, faces the audience as she applies cold cream in a mirror without glass.



As though in a daydream, five men in faded red overalls appear and move furniture and small objects slowly around her bedroom, lifting, bending. She puts on a street dress and dances with the men.

5

The second girl, now a woman, enters and reminds the First Mother of the old tales of their ancestral tribe, of the great totem in the forest.

The men fade into the backstage.

The second woman picks up a crystal ball from the mirror table and the two look into it intensely, as the stage goes black to reveal their vision.



6

(The Vision)

A clearing in a forest.

A hill surrounded by a circle of pines.

A giant totem rises from the center of the hill.

A few feet from the totem, a Native American girl dressed in fringed suede looks up at the totem.

The forest swells around her as the stage goes black.

7

Streetlamp.

Bench.

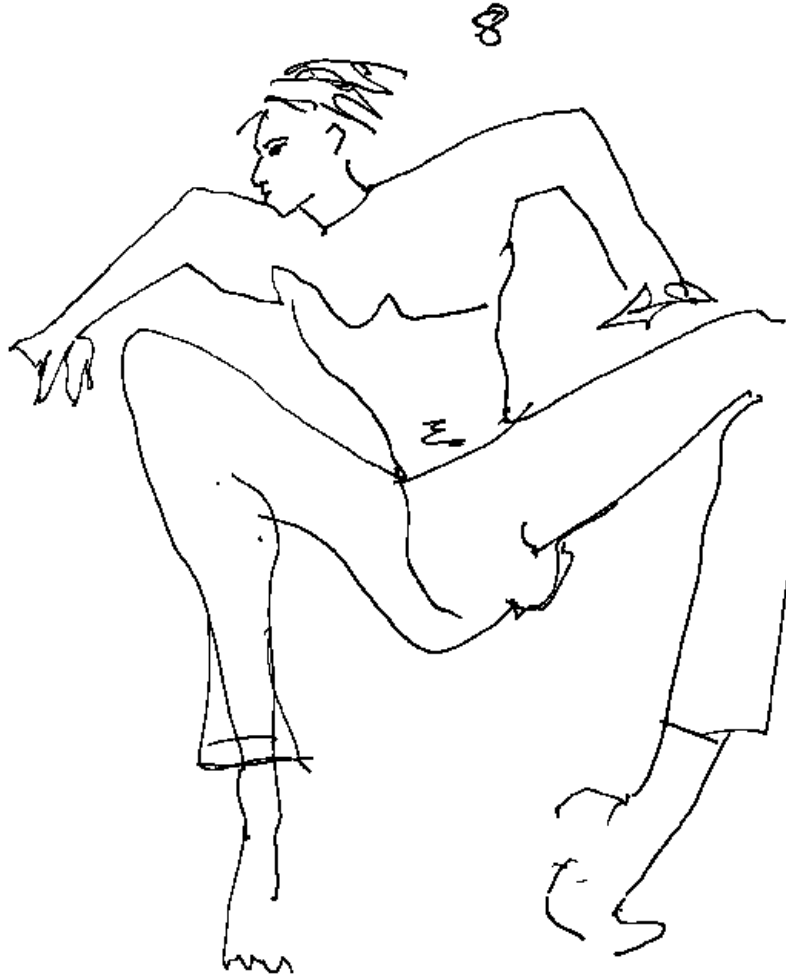
The two young women dance together a long duet, with the tenderness of girls who will be friends till death.



8

The son of the First Mother enters, wild, dancing, dressed a bit like a Cossack.

The two women grab hold of him till he calms down.



9

Three bare-chested workingmen slowly pass by the three.
The son looks at them.
They look at him.
The women pull him away and escort him off stage.
Blackout.

10

The three workers play at lunch, wrestling.
The son appears.
They grow mistrustful.
He begins reading a book.
They ignore him.
He draws nearer.
They encircle him, pulling at him, embracing him, threatening him.
Blackout.

11

Nighttime.
The three workers are drinking beer.
A policeman walks by.
They laugh.



The cop leaves but returns with three others, who encircle the workers, whom they taunt, holding them, stroking them, as though making love to them, to humiliate them.

Some society women in silks and furs enter in a line from rear left to front right and exit, the line splitting the workers from the police.

The First Mother is among them.

Ashamed, she remains on stage as they exit, then lets fall her costume.

12

Wearing a simple dress, she dances with the three workers and four police.

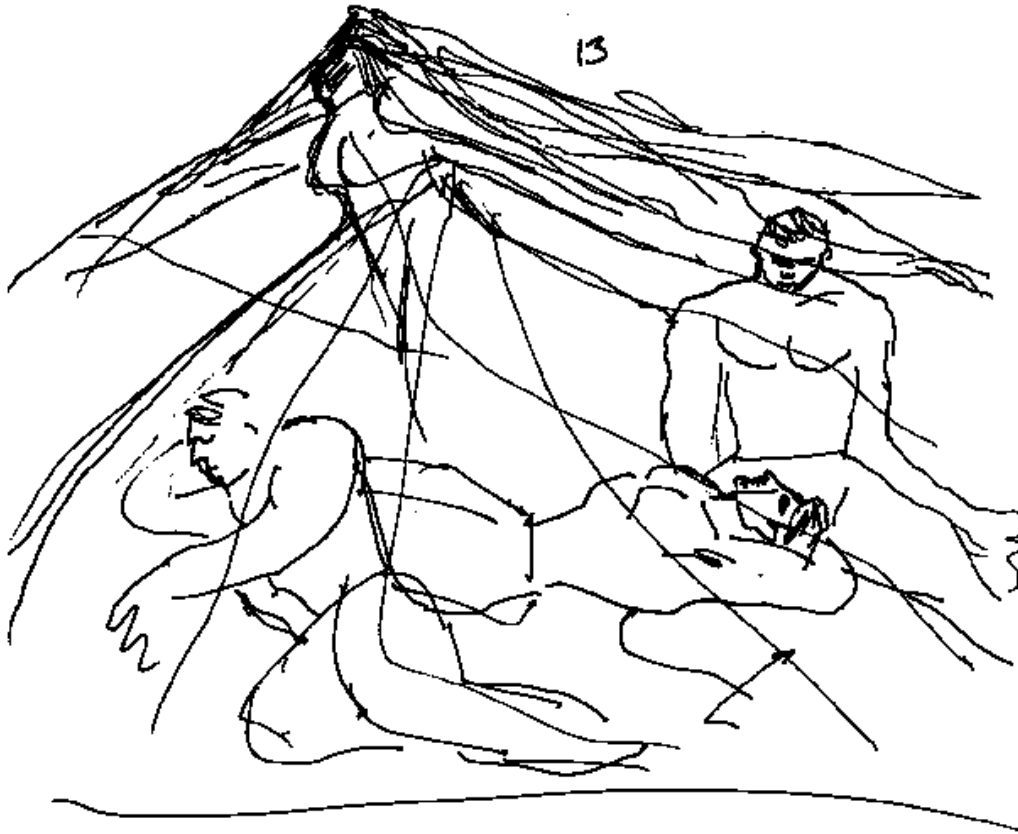
She and the police leave, and the workmen lie down and fall asleep.
Blackout.

13

(The Dream of the Workers, 1)

Dim haunted light.

The White Mother of Plenty, played by the First Mother, enters, trailing long silky dusk-colored material, violet, rose, pale blue.



She covers the workers with it.

Around her, in a pastel seascape, some children play.

A white child injures a black child, whose mother enters and carries him off stage.

The workers toss and turn in their sleep.

Outsize shadows play on the walls.

14

(The Dream of the Workers, 2)

A dark-suited politician with a satchel enters.

The women from Scene 1 enter, weave around him, removing his clothes and replacing them with a guerrilla's uniform.

They hand him a submachine gun then exit.

Transformed, he sneaks off stage. Blackout.

14



15

Two of the workers are on stage.

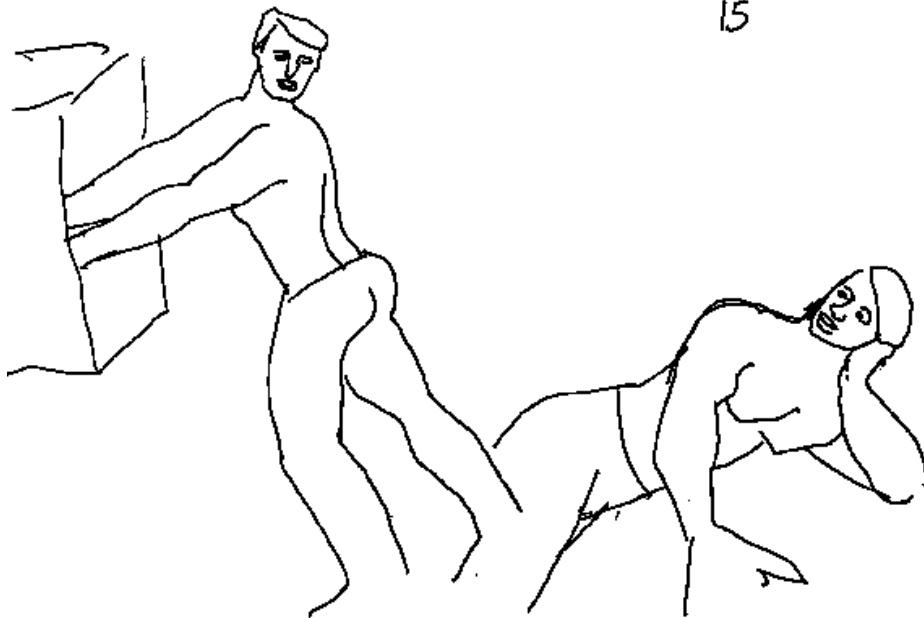
One is stacking boxes, squatting, twisting, lifting. His back is toward the second, who is sitting on the floor, writing on a large sheet of paper as he looks the first up and down.

But whenever the first looks at the second, on every third twist, the second looks away, till the fifth set of twists, when his eyes stay on the first.

The first stops and stares, the second rises and the two walk toward each other then exit, stage left.

The third worker enters stage right, raises an arm in their direction as though calling them, and, running, exits stage left. Blackout.

15



16

The circle of trees, as in Part 6.
A totem in center stage rises to beyond invisibility.
The three workers from Part 15 enter.



The First Mother appears, dressed now as the Native American girl.
She steps close to the totem and looks up at it, coldly rapt, hate flashing
briefly across her face, which then becomes proud, meditative.
Blackout.

17

The circle of trees. A chair and a small table with a typewriter on it have
replaced the totem. Two books lie on the floor underneath.
A muscular forty-year-old man is alone on stage, wearing red-and-white-
striped briefs.
There are barbells next to the table.
Gymnastic rings hang from the ceiling.
He is exercising, bending, lifting, twisting like the workers.

18

His thirty-year-old self, dressed identically, enters and goes to the
barbells as the older sits at the typewriter and begins typing, which he continues
through to the end.

19

The son from Part 8 enters, twenty years younger than the man at the typewriter, but dressed the same.

He joins the thirty-year-old at the barbells.

The Native American girl enters stage left and looks up at the audience in the balcony.



20

The guerrilla fighter enters from behind the trees, and at the same time the Native American girl removes her costume and wig to reveal her identity as the First Mother, then reverses the fringed suedes, transforming them into a long black costume and headdress sparkling with sequins.

The women from Part 1 line the back of the stage.

The First Mother looks up at the balcony as the stage darkens except for spots on her and the guerrilla, the exercising males, and the man typing.

All lights off but one or two dimly on her, which reflect from the sequins back all over the stage and audience, floor, ceiling, walls, like stars in the night sky.

Music ends.

True blackout.

Sounds of typing stop. Silence.